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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a course, "Professional Problems," offered at the University of Virginia to graduate students in psychology who are planning to become college teachers. The professor in charge discusses how he organizes his course and what topics he covers during the semester. Some of the subjects his students consider are: history of higher education, governance, types of higher education institutions, academic freedom and tenure, student rights and responsibilities, curricula, course planning, instructional techniques, grading and examining, teacher evaluation, student-faculty relations, the marketplace, personnel problems, financial resources, and social controls as indicated by ethical standards and legislation. A bibliography of mostly recent significant works on higher education is included. (JS)

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# Professional Problems: preparation for a career in college teaching

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## FOREWORD

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education, one of a network of clearinghouses established by the U.S. Office of Education, is concerned with undergraduate, graduate, and professional education. As well as abstracting and indexing significant, current documents in its field, the Clearinghouse prepares its own and commissions outside works on various aspects of higher education.

To afford wider distribution of this useful paper which deals with many aspects of the preparation of college teachers, we asked Frank W. Finger, professor of psychology at the University of Virginia, to expand on an article that appeared in the November 1969 issue of the *American Psychologist*. (Permission was granted by the American Psychological Association for its adaptation.) For the past twenty years, Professor Finger has offered a seminar to graduate students who are planning to become college teachers. His course, "Professional Problems," is one of the few efforts being made to introduce prospective teachers to the world of higher education.

The Clearinghouse is currently engaged in a related project, the compilation of a compendium including descriptions of studies on the preparation of college teachers, ongoing programs, and proposals for new graduate degrees. It will be available from the Clearinghouse in June 1970.

Carl J. Lange, Director  
ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education  
April 1970

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In contrast to the practitioners of other professions, the typical college teacher is thrown into his first job with little training in the primary skills that he is expected to exercise, and with minimal appreciation of the complexity of his professional position. It seems to be tacitly assumed that mastery of the subject matter of his discipline automatically confers the ability to communicate it effectively to students, to give competent educational and personal counsel, to participate wisely in curriculum evaluation and reform, to help guide the institution in its relations with the larger community, to acquire a new book or piece of equipment in spite of administrative red tape, to differentiate between the SDS and the NSA, and to secure a federal grant for educational innovation or summer research. In the absence of supplementary indoctrination by the employing institution, any self-doubts the new teacher may have are probably valid.

Specific efforts to ameliorate this situation have been described from time to time (e.g., Costin, 1968; Dunkel, 1958). Moreover, the employment of graduate students as teaching assistants provides, in some universities, a sort of on-the-job training (Koen, 1968; Nowlis, 1968). One of the most effective current programs combines the resources of several academic departments and the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching at the University of Michigan. And the University of Utah schedules a five-day workshop for teaching assistants preceding the beginning of the fall semester; departments are responsible for the follow-up during the year.

With few exceptions, however, these programs appear to be too vaguely planned and loosely administered to qualify as professional preparation. Perhaps this represents a justifiable reluctance to suggest prescriptions for an area in which satisfactory criteria of success are extremely elusive and even the underlying objectives are often subject to inconclusive debate. Or there may be fear that the intrusion of any significant amount of "methods" or "philosophy" of higher education would fatally dilute the departmental curriculum.

Default by inaction is not the only alternative to the threats of dogmatism and imbalance. Over the past 20 years, I have offered a two-semester graduate seminar entitled "Professional Problems," which attempts to steer a reasonable course between these extremes. I proceed on the assumption that, while I am short of final answers, I am pretty well acquainted with the variety of problems of the academic world, and can at least alert the prospective teacher to their existence. I can, by my own account and through exposure to the professional literature, introduce him to the alternative approaches to their solution. I hope I can coax him into the persisting habit of reading appropriate material, of evaluating and challenging his own pedagogical preconceptions, of developing new ideas and subjecting them to discussion and pragmatic test.

As a preface to the detailed description of the course, a number of general characteristics that probably contribute to its success should be noted.

1. Only students in the latter half of the graduate program are eligible to enroll. They have essentially completed their course work and passed the qualifying examinations for the

doctorate, and thus can begin to accept me more as colleague than critic. To emphasize this relationship, we usually agree that the grade report, unfortunately still required by the registrar, will ordinarily be unaffected by course performance. Indeed, I use such terms as "course" and "student" only for convenience, and with apology for their inappropriateness.

2. Inclusion in the group is by mutual desire and consent. This stipulation, while admittedly stacking the cards in my favor, has the desirable result of keeping enrollment within the optimal range of seven to ten.

3. None of us claims omniscience. We do take turns preparing background material and directing the conversation, but any tendency to take the assigned role of "expert" too seriously can be expected to provoke polite skepticism if not vigorous resistance, especially when we proceed from "fact" to interpretation and recommendation. Appeal to authority is also unlikely to shut off debate, for it becomes apparent early in the year that the literature is more often marked by diversity of opinion than unanimity. Our objective is less to achieve consensus than to become aware of alternative positions and to nurture a perpetual willingness to entertain new points of view.

4. The "noncourse" atmosphere is enhanced by meeting in the evening, weekly, in the quasi-social setting of our several homes. The typical session lasts for three or four hours, interrupted midway by a pause for refreshment.

5. The order of topics and the time spent on each vary from year to year, depending upon the particular enthusiasms of the participants, where or what "the action" presently is, and our fluctuations of mood.

6. Our discussions are based, when possible, upon prior preparation. There is no single textbook, although Buxton (1956) and Lee (1967) are very useful as starters. From our basic list of several dozen book titles and serials, each student during the year will browse through 15 or 20, about half of general interest and the others more or less prescribed for a given week. We maintain currency by regular reading of the *American Psychologist* (psychology's "house organ"), the News and Comments section of *Science*, the *AAUP Bulletin*, and (especially) *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Each student explores one topic in depth, through reading and sometimes a minor research project, and leads its discussion for a session or two. On topics not thus assigned, it is I who must do the principal homework. We all feel free to interject illustrations from our own experience, disguising identities as judgment and taste dictate.

Another source of current literature is *Research in Education*, published monthly by the U.S. Office of Education. A bibliographical guide to its entries on higher education is compiled and published periodically by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education.

7. Our discussions are often enriched by pertinent reports from previous years' members, by letter, tape, or in person. Other members of the departmental or university staff may join us on request. And the President of the University has accepted our invitation for an interchange of views.

As I have intimated, the correspondence between the list of topics that I originally present to the group and the course as it actually unfolds is less than perfect. Perhaps what follows is most honestly described as one series of events that could occur, not entirely by chance. It should be noted that the course is designed to meet the particular needs of graduate students in psychology. Adaptation of the general plan for use in another department would involve substituting the appropriate terminology at a number of points and eliminating discussion of such relatively esoteric problems as licensure for private practice. Only a few of the references cited depend heavily upon strictly psychological content, and even they may be of illustrative value to specialists in other areas.

#### *Introduction to seminar*

I start by outlining my objectives for offering the course, describing a number of actual and abortive attempts at other universities to achieve some of these goals, and speculating a bit why so few programs seem to generate and sustain adequate support. I then outline our anticipated procedure and invite the students to add to my tentative (following) list of topics.

#### *Fields of psychology*

With a bow to the breadth implied by the title of the course (devised originally to beguile an overly conservative Graduate Committee and Dean), and to gain some perspective against which to examine academic psychology, we consider the kinds of settings in which psychologists work (Webb, 1962). In each instance, we look at employment statistics, responsibilities, interprofessional relations, range of remuneration and perquisites, training required, patterns of advancement, and probable direction of change. Mobility among the fields, especially in and out of the academic, is noted.

#### *History of academic and professional psychology*

The present relationships (including the undoubted tensions) among academic and nonacademic psychologists, and between such divergent academic groups as clinicians and experimentalists, can better be appreciated after studying certain trends and salient events of the past 100 years. One framework that ties together the development of professional psychology and its current status is organization. The origin and growth of the various psychological associations and societies are sketched, with some emphasis on personalities; formal history is supplemented by anecdote. A contemporary analysis of the American Psychological Association is made—structure, functions, politics. We struggle a bit with the proposition that the individual has an obligation to his profession, best met by involvement in the appropriate organizations, however burdensome this may sometimes be. The listing of nonpsychological organizations to which psychologists belong suggests the desirability of ignoring artificial disciplinary boundaries.

#### *History of higher education*

Whether certain practices in the modern university exist for currently valid reasons or represent cultural lag can more clearly be judged as their evolution is traced. In the transition from the mid-nineteenth century college to the postwar university (Veysey, 1965), the influence of general national trends is

easily discernible; it is an interesting exercise to crystal ball the response of higher education to hypothesized sociopolitical convulsions in the closing decades of the millennium (Eurich, 1968). The proposition that the relationship may be reciprocal underlies our consideration of the potential influence of psychologists and other academic professionals upon public policy.

#### *Governance*

The interlocking roles of trustees, legislature (where pertinent), president, deans, chairmen, faculty, alumni, nonteaching staff, and students are examined (Demerath, 1967; Wilson, 1965) with the aid of tables of organization, books and articles by representatives of each group, and my observations. At least one institution and state system, and certainly our own, is analyzed in detail, with some historical background. An attempt is made to differentiate between nominal power and de facto control, with the usual obeisance toward the dean's secretary and the maintenance personnel.

#### *Types of institutions*

We enumerate and categorize the institutions of higher learning according to various classification systems, such as size, degrees offered, sources of support, geographical distribution, and characteristics of the student body (Singletary, 1968). It is usually in this context that we compare different types of psychology departments, partly with an eye to future appointments. We ponder the advisability of offering psychology in subcollegiate settings, and occasionally bring the statistics on this practice up to date by mail survey.

#### *Academic freedom and tenure*

Judgment by one's peers, as the standard for appropriate professional behavior, is examined as it has been applied to higher education and research (Metzger, 1969). The role of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) in the formalization and implementation of the concept of academic freedom, and the more recent evolution of legal precedents, are delineated. It is not difficult to generate debate on the drawbacks and merits of continuous tenure, as both instigation to premature ossification and protection against arbitrary thought control from within and outside the university (Byse and Joughin, 1959).

#### *Student rights and responsibilities*

This topic has peculiar relevance at the moment, and there is no end of hot-off-the-press material for discussion. Our leader this year, suggesting the alternative title "The Unreconciled," began with student dissatisfaction with the medieval university, and only after several hours brought us to the barricades of the '60s and the "Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students" (Schwartz, 1967). It seemed to us that an important factor in the era of confrontation has been the failure of the teaching profession to accept its proper responsibility for governance and that this is symptomatic of the general unconcern for professional problems that such devices as this seminar are designed to counteract (Schwab, 1969).

#### *Objectives of higher education*

The logical first step in establishing a curriculum or planning a course is to decide what changes in the student are sought.

Lists of goals can be found, under such rubrics as liberal education and general education (Williams, 1968). Our agreement on priorities is never perfect, which reassures us that there will always be variety sufficient to accommodate the wide individual differences among eight million collegians. We diverge still further when we try to establish criteria by which achievement of these goals can be demonstrated, which is a source of particular embarrassment to us behavioral scientists. One may, perhaps, be sustained by the faith that any set of objectives is preferable to none, and that one's teaching will surely be more vital if he has at least struggled to formulate a statement of purpose.

#### *Varieties of curriculum*

The faculty member will be able to respond better to deficiencies in existing course patterns if he has some appreciation of the alternatives. By report and readings, we are introduced to standard curricula and to examples of experimental programs (Dressel, 1968). We acknowledge the desirability of evaluation, and grapple with the obstacles thereto, especially the distorting effect of novelty itself. Each of us constructs an "ideal" curriculum for some hypothetical population of undergraduates, justifying each characteristic by reference to a guiding set of objectives. In still more detail, we devise and defend schemes for the major in psychology (McKeachie, 1961). The virtues of interdisciplinary courses and majors are weighed, with real and imaginary illustrations.

#### *Course planning*

Most of the members of the seminar have had considerable exposure to introductory psychology courses, and many of them have suggestions for improvement (Walker and McKeachie, 1967). The detailed planning of a course brings them a little closer to the harsh realities of personal responsibility. Presentation of the plans to the class usually precipitates further dispute over goals, this time tied more closely to what actually might happen in the classroom. If time permits, each student outlines one advanced course. We inspect critically the various psychology course syllabi available, such as those assembled by the Course-Outlines Project of Division 2 of the American Psychological Association.

#### *Techniques of instruction*

While agreeing that no universal formula for success can be given the prospective teacher, we find it valuable to read and talk about the several techniques. I usually start by presenting my own biases with regard to effective lecturing, and the students quickly demonstrate that there are differences of opinion. We proceed to consideration of other teaching methods (Brown, 1963; Skinner, 1968): discussion, seminar, tutorial, laboratory, programmed instruction, and their combinations. Uses and abuses of audiovisual aids and demonstrations are weighed. Our discussion is supplemented by (invited) visits to various undergraduate classes.

#### *Practicum in teaching*

Most of our students have served as assistants in undergraduate courses, and have been permitted to exercise a fair amount of independence in the laboratories. Further, the teaching aspect of seminar reports is stressed in some of our substantive graduate courses. It has never been the practice in

our department, however, to employ students as even semi-independent instructors. In an effort to compensate for this lack, I arrange for several guest appearances of each seminar member. Most of these are in the introductory course, or in the fairly large intermediate course, and thus principally entail lecturing (McKeachie, 1969). The preferred plan is to give the student responsibility for a fairly well defined block of subject matter, and make available from two to six successive class periods. The extent of guidance is left to the student teacher and the responsible professor; my contribution to preparation is seldom more than very general. Unless the novice prefers otherwise, the rest of us observe from the rear of the classroom or through a one-way window. He usually finds it instructive, albeit somewhat traumatic, to review a tape of his performance. At our next session, we take time to hear his account of the experience, and we offer whatever suggestions seem appropriate. Some students seek a private conference with me for a more searching critique.

When possible, a student undertakes two series of substitute lectures, one during the first half of the year and the second toward the end, after our group discussion of the teaching process. While more extended practice would be beneficial, the limitation in time is, to some extent, offset by the more thorough preparation and intensive evaluation possible with the briefer assignment.

As the student takes his place behind the podium, certain matters of classroom administration are brought forcibly to his attention. Although his transient status limits his practical response, it affords a fitting time to swap recipes on the handling of routine and unusual organizational problems.

#### *Examining and grading*

An inescapable chore in most institutions is the certification of student performance, and the teacher's job is almost always complicated by this requirement. The new instructor may be particularly troubled by the apparent incompatibility between his twin roles of guide and evaluator, and experience may blunt his sensitivity to the dilemma rather than resolve it. To this are added certain mechanical complexities; if simple psychometric principles are known to college instructors (Wood, 1961), they are largely ignored in the testing and grading process. Some practice in examination construction and consideration of sample cases may be added to our class's theoretical discussions.

#### *Evaluation of teachers and teaching*

There is a substantial body of research comparing the effectiveness of instructional techniques, and searching for critical variables in the teaching situation (McKeachie, 1964). Our study of these data is less likely to reveal compelling arguments for adopting a particular teaching format than to generate an urge to do some investigating of our own. One project frequently suggested is the development of an evaluation form especially adapted for our departmental needs. Its application seems to be helpful to our colleagues, and it certainly dispels any preconception that definitive research in this area is simple—or even that undergraduates can readily be persuaded to play the part of judicious customer. The results of the college-wide evaluation of courses and teachers, administered by the student

government, have particular impact (and sometimes generate considerable sympathy), since we are well acquainted with the objects of the scrutiny. We also consider evaluation programs at other institutions, such as the one that has evolved over a 45-year span at the University of Washington.

#### *Student-faculty relations*

What are the faculty member's responsibilities to the student outside the classroom, and to what extent can extracurricular contacts affect the formal learning process as well as the general morale on campus? We consider the place of professional counselors in the educational enterprise, and their possible modes of cooperation with the professor (Siegel, 1968). Unfortunately, a large proportion of us are in colleges that make only limited provision for help by specialists, and we must individually work out some compromise between responding to the needs of the student and recognizing the limits of our competence. The graduate teaching assistant, being simultaneously a dispenser and a consumer of counsel, is in a uniquely favorable position to contribute to our deliberations. It is often the discussion of this problem that leads to the almost inevitable gripe session of the class—the invaluable consequence of which is the stirring of our departmental staff into periodic self-analysis.

#### *The marketplace*

It is natural for the members of the seminar to have certain practical concerns (Caplow, 1961; Marshall, 1964). What jobs are available for next year? How are contacts best made and exploited? What aspects of a position should most concern the candidate? What sort of bargaining is feasible? How are decisions between competing offers reached (a question becoming less critical with the shift of the market)? How should final agreements be formalized? I try to guide their thinking beyond original appointment. What is expected of the new teacher? How does one carve out his individual niche in the academic world? How can one ensure his continuing professional growth and corresponding institutional advancement? Should one seek out or seek to avoid administrative responsibilities? What sorts of consulting opportunities outside the university are available, and how can they best be integrated with the rest of one's work? Obviously our talk spans a wide range—from vita to philosophy of life, from committee assignments to tuition grants for children, from faculty teas to research leaves, from library acquisitions to AAUP compensation scales. Before the year is over, the seminar becomes the informal clearinghouse for the latest market news and firsthand reports of job interviews and missed airline connections.

#### *Personnel problems*

Professors and administrators are people and, like other people, carry their personalities along with them to the office. As long as this is so, ability and performance will be imperfectly correlated, recognition and reward sometimes whimsical, and job satisfaction only partially a function of salary and teaching load. The case histories we recount range all the way to psychosis, and the solutions that are volunteered are about as varied as we are. While it is unfortunate that the students have to be left in a state of some uncertainty, at least they are

alerted to the variety of exigencies with which they may be required to cope.

#### *Information storage and retrieval*

Journals, books, abstracts, proceedings, meetings—the life of the scholar is becoming increasingly complex on both input and output sides. We try to foresee new practices, including computer assistance. Meanwhile, we find it useful to discuss the preparation of journal articles and the process of shepherding the manuscript through to the publication stage (as well as the cost of supplying reprints!). The quite different art of oral communication of scientific results merits still more attention, and the spring regional and state meetings add the emphasis of reality for most of the students.

#### *Financial resources for higher education and research*

If for no other reason than to know what requests can reasonably be made of the administration, a faculty member should have some knowledge of institutional bread-and-butter matters (Chambers, 1968). We document the general survey of financing by detailed examination of our own university's capital and operating budgets. To one who would anticipate the future, for example in terms of government control of education or the ultimate fate of the private university, an evaluation and projection of current fiscal trends is in order. As "the crunch" becomes more threatening, there is increasing incentive to explore the possibilities for support of personal research, and the students respond with alacrity to my suggestion that each prepare for criticism a grant proposal in the form required by some federal or foundation funding agency.

#### *Social control: ethics, accreditation, legislation*

With the proliferation of applied specialties since World War II, psychology has undergone a virtual revolution in terms of formal controls over both practice and training. The Code of Ethics of the American Psychological Association (*Casebook*, 1967; Golann, 1970) includes a number of items of special relevance to the teacher-scientist. Since individual conscience is supplemented by group consensus in the enforcement process, exchange of points of view within the class is particularly valuable. Some attention is given to the recurrent suggestions for development of general standards of professional conduct for scientists, for example through the American Association for the Advancement of Science, as well as to the possibility of achieving a code for college teachers through the AAUP committee on ethics. We follow the arguments for and against APA's approval of graduate specialty programs and of internships, and note the function of the American Board of Professional Psychology in conferring diplomate status on certain classes of professionals.

For the purpose of illustration, the 25-year history of legislative control in Virginia is reviewed from the conception of the first certification bill to the practices of the present licensing board, including its involvement in the nationwide reciprocity efforts. To heighten our concern, there are usually Congressional hearings on invasion of privacy, use of psychological tests, limitations on research involving human subjects, conditions of animal care and experimentation, as well as on the use

of fiscal power to limit the vigor of campus dissent. Problems of control have been particularly delicate in psychology, because of the nature of its basic subject matter and because of the discrepant orientations of researcher and practitioner. We suspect, however, that our colleagues in other fields will increasingly be confronted with similar issues, and that the study of our recent history could contribute to the wisdom of their decisions.

Does the seminar work? The reactions of the students, and particularly their testimony in later years, point to an affirmative answer. They have approached the postdoctoral phase of their careers with increased confidence, they have entered into their teaching duties with zest and seemingly with more than modest success, and they have promptly become effective participants in institutional affairs. Perhaps more important, many of them have maintained their active concern for the broad spectrum of higher education, have continued their reading and practical experimentation, and have helped bring to a number of campuses a broadened conception of the profession. It is not surprising that their considerable awareness and relative sophistication with regard to academic matters has tended from their first appointment to thrust them into positions of professional leadership, formal and informal. I should interject that this has apparently not hampered their growth as scientists, for their publication record attests to continuing research activity.

The value of the seminar is not limited to its effects upon the students. The reading and debating that is good for them helps maintain the elasticity of my professorial arteries, and

their younger view helps me see the academic world through less presbyopic eyes. There is evidence from time to time that other students and staff members are drawn into the informal discussions that spill over between meetings, so that the impact upon the attitudes and practices within the department is fairly general. It is gratifying that reports of what we are doing have influenced other departments to move in a similar direction, and it may even be that our activities have from time to time impinged, at least subliminally, upon the thought processes of our administrators, to our mutual benefit.

I cannot pretend that this type of course would be accepted warmly into every graduate department. We are fortunate that our students are well provided, by our staff, with the teacher-scientist model. Undergraduate instruction is considered neither demeaning nor remote from the laboratory, and involvement in institutional affairs is the mode. In a less congenial setting, "Professional Problems" might be more of a bore than a pleasure to the instructor, and simply an unwelcome intrusion into the graduate student's already crowded schedule.

Under attack as never before, the university cannot survive unaltered. It should be no surprise to today's professor if his influence in the councils of change is minimal, for his training has made him a subject specialist; he is, in no real sense, a professional in higher education. It may not be too late for faculty members themselves to undertake their own remedial, do-it-yourself continuing education program. Perhaps our brightest hope, however, is to provide a more balanced background for the professor of tomorrow.

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Some of the following works suggested for supplementary reading on higher education are available in microfiche (MF) or hard/photo copy (HC) from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service, National Cash Register Company, 4936 Fairmont Avenue, Bethesda, Maryland 20014. When ordering, please specify the ERIC document (ED) number. Payment must accompany orders of less than \$5.00. Abstracts of the documents appear in *Research in Education*, which is available from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402. Single copies cost \$1.75; annual subscriptions, \$21.00.

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